

Soldiers

Online

MARSHALLS INVAD

U. S. Forces Land
On Kwajalein Atoll

KWAJALEIN

U. S. Battles To Victory On Kwajalein

Biggest Naval Force In History Strikes

These Men Are Leading
U. S. Attacking Forces



Christian R. Holmes Dies In New York
Honolulu Star-Bulletin

HOME
EDITION

KWAJALEIN FALLS TO U. S.

TE NEWS

for Harry James: Reclassified L.A.

For Increased Ore Production

Longing To Explain Reason



U. S. ASSAULTS
IN MARSHALLS
WORRY JAPAN

Tokyo Tells Japanese

Americans Invading

Islands In Earnest

19 Islets In Atoll
In American Hands

Soldiers

The Battle for Kwajalein

Story By Jim Bennett
Photo Montage by Dan Adler

LANDING at Kwajalein Atoll's Bucholz Army Airfield today, one scarcely notices the marks of a historic battle there 56 years ago. A few battle markers and worn-down bunkers are about the only physical reminders that, before it was a world-class missile range with a global mission and all the comforts of small-town America, Kwajalein was a World War II Japanese base with a strategic mission.

Operation Flintlock changed that. From Jan. 30 to Feb. 5, 1944, the atoll was a battlefield where U.S. troops stormed beaches and fought their way through bomb- and shell-ravaged jungle and bunkers.

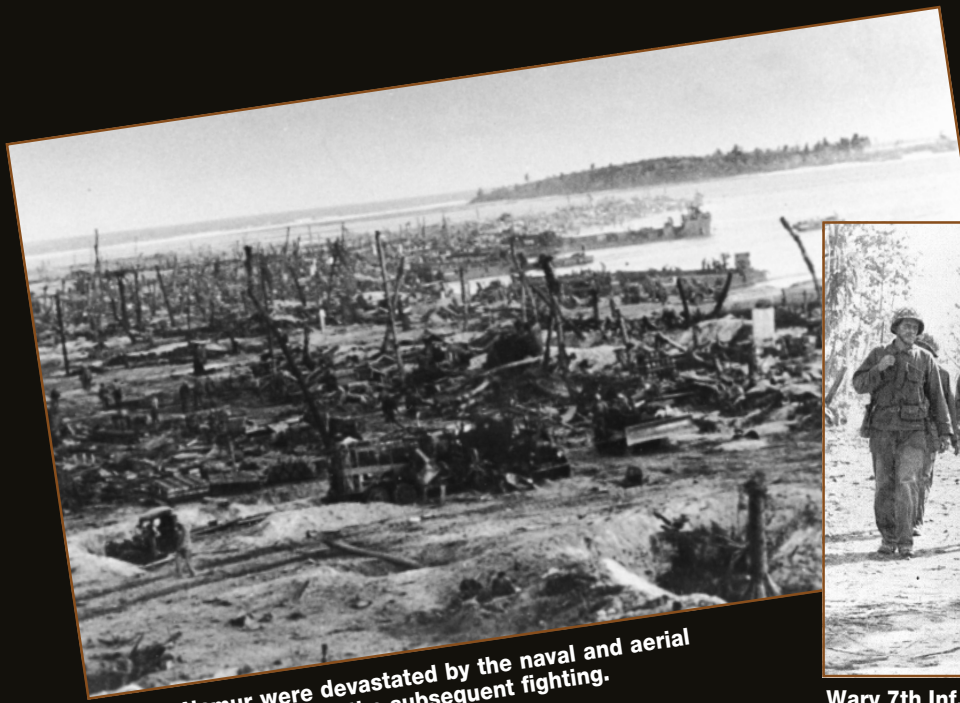
Today, the island little resembles its war days. The United States has added entire sections of land along Lagoon Road and north of Bunker Hill, for example. Trees have grown where the terrain once appeared as a moonscape from the battle damage. And entire complexes of buildings and huge sensors have been built.

Jim Bennett is editor of The Kwajalein Hourglass. Dan Adler is the paper's graphics editor.

(Right, above) Soldiers of the 7th Infantry Division carry a wounded comrade on a stretcher through the desolate Kwajalein terrain.

(Right) Soldiers take a moment out from battle to play cards while other soldiers survey the scene.





Roi and Namur were devastated by the naval and aerial bombardments, and by the subsequent fighting.



Wary 7th Inf. Div. troops move forward past the body of a fallen comrade. The division lost 142 soldiers in the battle for Kwajalein.

Since the war, the staff of the island's newspaper, The Kwajalein Hourglass, has been here collecting stories and photos. That has given them an opportunity to view images seen by few, except perhaps archivists at the Smithsonian Institution or U.S. military museums. Over the years, as

photos from the battles at Kwajalein Atoll have surfaced, people have trusted the Hourglass with their keeping. Many have run in anniversary stories, but many more photos have remained in boxes, with no room to run in the paper.

Recently, the photos were joined by

photographs taken by Marine Corps combat photographer Sgt. Andrew Zurick. Today, Zurick's son, Pat, works on Kwajalein.

The collection depicts men in combat. But it depicts more than that. One can open up any number of books at any library and see combat photos.

Hitting the Beaches



Men of the 7th Infantry Division head for Kwajalein aboard landing craft at 9:30 a.m. on Feb. 1, 1944.

WHEN soldiers and marines hit Kwajalein's beaches, they were backed by a massive naval and air bombardment intended to knock out Japanese fortifications.

Near the islands of Roi and Namur, Navy ships laid a nonstop barrage of 2,655 tons of ammunition. A regiment of 75mm and 105mm howitzers bombarded the islands from five nearby islands.

Marines hit the beaches at 11 a.m. and faced relatively light resistance on Roi, but stronger defenses on Namur. Meanwhile, near Kwajalein, Navy ships fired 7,000 shells into the

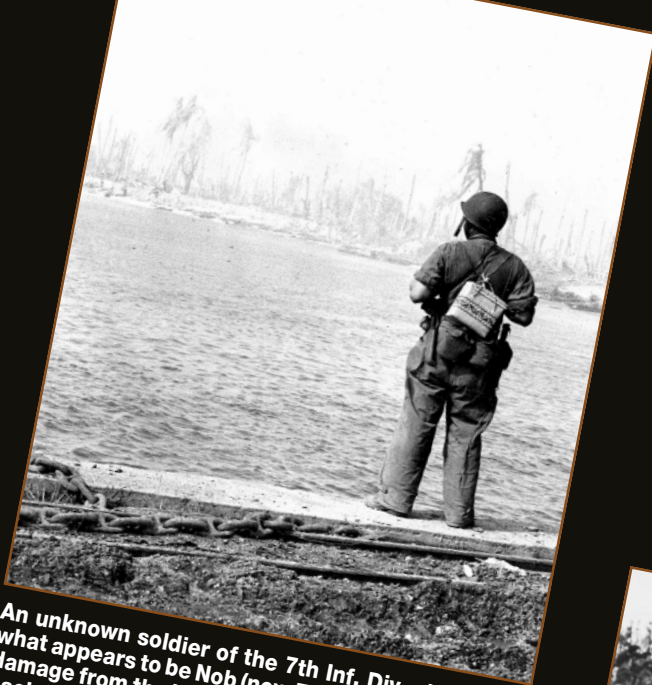
island's defenses on the morning of Feb. 1, alone, not counting the heavy bombardment days before the attack. Navy aircraft flew 96 sorties over Kwajalein before H-Hour.

Forty-eight 105mm howitzers and several 155mm howitzers bombarded Kwajalein from nearby Carlson Island, sending in more than 29,000 shells.

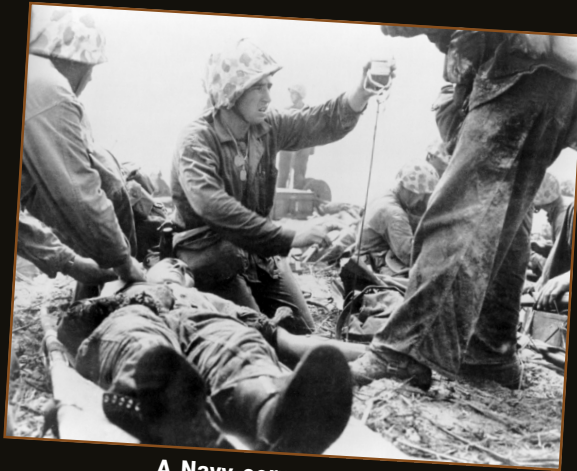
As the bombardment ended, 1,200 soldiers landed on the west end of Kwajalein without a casualty. Units advanced 1,800 yards up the island before the end of the day, losing 17 dead and 46 wounded, while killing 500 Japanese and capturing 11 more.

On-island Combat

As soldiers advanced on Kwajalein, they faced stiffer resistance. The surviving Japanese had recovered from the heavy shelling and began organizing a defense along the front lines. The Japanese also conducted late-night counterattacks, and individual defenders tried to infiltrate the American lines.



An unknown soldier of the 7th Inf. Div. stands on what appears to be Nob (now Echo) Pier, surveying damage from the battle of Kwajalein Island. On his back is a Marshallese-woven bag.



A Navy corpsman treats a wounded Marine officer on Roi-Namur.



Marines gather at a burial service for fallen comrades shortly after the battles of Roi and Namur islands.

These are pictures of men who fought — some lived, some died — on the ground where, today, Americans live and play.

And what better way to honor our veterans than to remember them in these evocative photographs taken by veterans? □

The fighting over the next three days quickly deteriorated into small-unit actions, as soldiers sought out snipers and attacked heavily defended bunkers and buildings. As they neared what is now Kwajalein's "downtown," the Americans faced a whole complex of fiercely defended Japanese buildings.

On day three, shortly after sunset, Japanese soldiers charged American lines near what is now 6th Street. The attackers were cut down to the last man.

By the fourth day, troops advancing oceanside reached Bunker Hill, which was the end of the island at the time. At that point, organized resistance ceased and a day of mop-up operations began.

Roi fell quickly, but the Japanese had well prepared Namur for attack. The action was further complicated as marines mistakenly destroyed a blockhouse used as a storage building filled with torpedo warheads and aerial bombs. The explosion killed Japanese and Americans alike and filled the sky with a towering, thick black smoke.

The Marines' 2nd Battalion suffered more than half of its total casualties in that one explosion.

The Wounded

On Kwajalein Island, 845 Americans were wounded in action. When possible, the wounded were evacuated to the rear and then transported to hospital ships offshore and in the lagoon.

Soldiers took the greatest number of casualties on the second and third days after the invasion — 244 and 255 wounded, respectively — as they encountered stiff resistance in bunkers and heavily defended buildings. Marines on Roi and Namur islands recorded 547 wounded in the 24 hours of action.

The Fallen

On Kwajalein, the 7th Infantry Division lost 142 dead and two missing in action. Estimates put Japanese losses at 4,938 dead, with 206 more taken prisoner, including

127 Korean laborers.

On Roi and Namur islands, 190 marines died. The enemy lost 3,472 dead and 51 prisoners of war.

Victory

The victory at Kwajalein Atoll could hardly have been more complete. It marked the first time U.S. troops had taken prewar Japanese territory, and it established another key American base in the Central Pacific.

This presence helped lead to the isolation of the Bismarks, Solomons and New Guinea. Furthermore, many Japanese positions were bypassed as a result of the success at Kwajalein Atoll, allowing U.S. forces to concentrate on other targets, including successful assaults on the Philippines and Marianas.

The battles proved true the lessons learned in the earlier U.S. invasion of Tarawa, and those lessons would become a part of U.S. amphibious landing operations in the years to come. — *Jim Bennett*